

ENGLISH 163
Spring 1974

Assignment #1

Write on one question only, though a single answer combining elements of several questions is permitted. Write one or two single-spaced pages. IN ALL CASES BE EXPLICIT, WITH REFERENCE TO PARTICULAR SEQUENCES FROM THE FILM(S).

1. How does Griffith utilize his women for thematic and stylistic purposes? Can you see certain Victorian stereotypes embodied in the parts played by Mae Marsh and Lillian Gish in BIRTH OF A NATION, and by Gish in WAY DOWN EAST? Are those stereotypical attitudes ever transcended? ✓
2. Obviously the film expounds a rather monocular vision of American society and of the South in particular. How does Griffith succeed in fusing personal vision (the substance of his art) with a larger social commentary? Does he succeed? You might want also to ask here how a modern audience can (or cannot) integrate Griffith's "racism" within the framework of that personal vision.
3. Describe an episode where the technique of cross-cutting has been exploited fully (eg, the suicide of Flora). You might wish to contrast such a sequence with one in which the camera is permitted simply to observe, and in which Griffith has refrained from cutting (eg, the return of the "Little Colonel"). How do these two sequences differ in their effect?
4. What various elements are blended in THE BIRTH OF A NATION--action, family melodrama, romance, prophecy, politics--and how does Griffith manage to bring them all together? Does his film seem synthetic (in the best sense) or somewhat disorganized and sprawling? ✓
5. How does Griffith utilize certain optical effects--irises, dissolves, fades, double exposure--to heighten his drama? Give specific examples? ✓
6. Griffith's great strength, as noted by Eisenstein and many others, lies in his ability to tell a story. This narrative strength has become (would become after him) one of the American cinema's great strengths? What sort of narrative does Griffith like, judging from THE BIRTH OF A NATION and WAY DOWN EAST (what sorts of things go into it) and how does it get told? Can we infer at most times some relationship between the teller and the tale; if so, how?

INTELLIGENT — GO DEEPER
INTO THE IMAGE + THE
METAPHORICAL LAYERS OF THE FILM.

2+
Jeremy Butler
English 163
Mr. Silverman
February 15, 1974

Cinema: The Art of Subtlety

NO INFO NEEDED { Modernization of the cinema might well be described in terms of the constant growth of subtlety in films. As the movies have aged they have become more subtle and supposedly more at home in their own medium. One would then naturally expect that, as one of the pioneers of modern film, D. W. Griffith would contain the crudity of his era as well as the seed of modern day styles. Such is precisely the case. The optical effects of Birth of a Nation shock us with their bluntness at the same time they soothe us with their delicateness.

The iris is a particularly appropriate example of cinema's trend toward simpler, subtler methods. Griffith uses it generously in Birth of a Nation, but not to the extent that it was to be used five years later in Way Down East -- which leaves the modern day viewer wondering if he/she acquired tunnel vision while watching the film. I say "particularly appropriate" because though Griffith used it extensively and though it was a popular technique of the period it has to all extents totally dropped out of the modern filmmaker's repertoire, only to be replaced by less blunt techniques which serve the same purpose but do so less obviously. While Griffith blackens the entire screen but for the two faces of Lillian Gish and Richard Barthelmess when he proposes marriage to her in Way Down East today's filmmaker would probably darken the frame with inventive lighting to achieve a quieter but nonetheless definite effect. The design is the same, but the method used is only as advanced as practicalities (such as the poor quality of mercury vapor lamps Griffith had to use) and mental attitude will allow. The fact that Griffith realized that the picture ought to be darkened in order to highlight the action in one portion of the frame indicates his intention to use camera affects to heighten drama -- not merely to astound the audience as George Melies had.

GOOD POINT The case of double exposure is a little different. When Griffith uses it at the end of Birth of a Nation to provide a backdrop for one of the pair of lovers he obviously precursed later techniques such as back projection; but when he uses it during the shots of the exodus of refugees from Atlanta by showing Atlanta burning in the top portion of the screen, he directly precurses nothing except perhaps the use of divided screens in limited, faddish films such as The Thomas Crown Affair.

A third usage of double exposure in Birth of a Nation involves composition shots of, variously, a war god and a Christ figure ruling over masses of humanity. This use of double exposure for surrealism as moral was probably not originated by Griffith, though it is possible that he was the first to utilize it in such a moralistic fashion. At any rate, double exposure was often used in dream and supernatural sequences during the silent era. (One of the most famous of these utilizations of double exposure is the gradual evaporation of Nosferatu in F. W. Murnau's Nosferatu, 1922.) As more elaborate and precise methods of portraying strange apparitions were invented double exposure became more and more rare.

The fade is one optical effect that the sixty years since Birth of a Nation hasn't changed much. Most popular with Griffith is the slow fade while the camera holds on an enamored couple, such as

the final scenes of the story (before the morals, that is) in Birth of a Nation and the scene between Gish and Barthelmess after she has been rescued from the ice flow, fainted, revived and finally had her loved one promise eternal love in an iris shot so dim we can barely make out their figures. It brings to mind the scene from Love Story when Oliver is lying beside his leukemia-struck wife. Tears gently well up in the eyes of the movie goer as he/she sobs quietly. The fade provides the viewer with a quiet moment with him/herself. A time to fully feel the impact of the happiness or tragedy of the segment they have just seen. As is suggested by the emotional nature of the fade, it need not be reserved for lovers -- anything emotionally charged but unmoving will do: Gus's corpse, the bodies of Confederate and Union casualties, or Flora's dead body in the arms of "The Little Colonel".

The fade in general is used to provide a moment of rest before the next image is presented. This rest forces the audience to reflect on what has just transpired and hence adds impact to that scene. Whether it is a slow fade (as described above) or a fast one is determined by the degree of emphasis the director wishes to convey.

(The sectional I had planned to attend was cancelled.)

Stroheim questions:

1. GREED has always been accepted, in its time and subsequently, as a masterpiece of "realism," "naturalism" or, at least, of the depiction of everyday life. What elements and specific aspects of the film would seem to bear out such a description, and what would seem to point in another direction? If possible, define this opposite pull from "naturalism."
2. Stroheim has been quoted as saying: "Life is illogical. Plot is a pattern, the mechanism by which infantile minds are intrigued. Life has no plot; its riddle can never be solved." Since the film was based on McTEAGUE, a novel crammed with plot, what can Stroheim be saying? You might try to illuminate those illogical moments on which the movement of the film hinges, and calculate their effect on the central characters.
3. What are the basic expressive differences between Stroheim and Griffith, based on the two films you've seen? Don't limit yourself to purely technical matters here, but try to assess as well the emotive and intellectual attitude of the director to his work.
4. How does Stroheim achieve intensity in his film (bring in as many different sorts of expressive devices here)? How does he use these devices to control the mood of his film (you might contrast the first meeting of McTeague with the Sleppe family, the murder of Trina, and the final sequence in Death Valley).

GREED (1923)

Production Company: Goldwyn Company/M.G.M. Director: Erich von Stroheim. Screenplay: von Stroheim. From the novel, McTeague, by Frank Norris. Assistant Directors: Eddy Sowers and Louis Germonprez. Art Directors: Richard Day and von Stroheim. Photography: Ben Reynolds, William Daniels. Editing: von Stroheim, Rex Ingram and persons anonymous.

Gibson Gowland (McTeague), Zasu Pitts (Trina Sleppe), Jean Hersholt (Marcus Schouler), Tempe Piggett (McTeague's mother), Erich von Ritzau (Travelling dentist), Sylvia Ashton ("Homer" Sleppe), Chester Conklin ("Popper" Sleppe), Frank Hayes (Mr. Grannis), Dale Fuller (Maria Macapa) Lon Poff (man from Lottery Company)

QUESTIONS ON "THE DEVIL IS A WOMAN":

1. By precise examination of a shot or a series of shots analyze some of the constituent elements of Sternberg's style, and try to describe their particular use as part of the film as a whole. You might wish to concentrate on a single element (lighting, decor, movement within the frame) but try to see that element operative within some total effect, rather than as an isolated phenomenon.
2. Describe the qualities that make up the Dietrich persona and their deployment within this particular film. You should attempt this question only if you're reasonably familiar with one or two other Dietrich films recently shown here (or elsewhere) -- for example, Sternberg's DISHONORED, Tay Garnett's SEVEN SINNERS.
3. Describe the qualities of Sternberg's de-naturalized world as it is evoked in THE DEVIL IS A WOMAN. What psychosexual, stylistic, metaphoric associations are arranged, and do they add up to anything specific? Is it fair to call the film an "exercise in style," and does that necessarily mean that the film isn't good or serious? You might wish to examine the extremity of this film's commitment to artifice in the context of such compromises between metaphoric evocation and naturalistic notation as GRAED and THE BIRTH OF A NATION.

Brief Sternberg bibliography:

- Brownlow, Kevin. The Parade's Gone By. New York and London: Alfred A. Knopf and Secker & Warburg, 1968. Valuable illustration of Sternberg's lighting techniques.
- Baxter, John. The Cinema of Josef von Sternberg. London and New York: Avenner and A.S. Barnes, 1971. Reliable for facts, restrained in value judgments.
- Dickens, Homer. The Films of Marlene Dietrich. New York: Citadel Press, 1968. Accurate.
- Harrington, Curtis. An Index to the Films of Josef von Sternberg. London: British Film Institute, 1949. Inaccurate, rather excessive in judgments.
- Keezaraki, Richard. "The Golden Years: Jules Furthman," in The Hollywood Screenwriters, ed. Richard Corliss (New York: Avon Discus Books, 1971), pp. 48-61. Complete and accurate outline of career of chief collaborator of Sternberg, Hawks.
- Higham, Charles. Hollywood Cameramen: Sources of Light. London: Thames and Hudson, 1970. Interview with Lee Garmes.
- Kobal, John. Marlene Dietrich. London and New York: Studio Vista and E.P. Dutton, 1968. Attractively illustrated, much information.
- Rheuban, Joyce. "Josef von Sternberg: the Scientist and the Vamp," Sight and Sound, 42.1 (1972-73), 34-40. Sexuality in Sternberg's films, attitudes toward women.
- Sarris, Andrew. The Films of Josef von Sternberg. New York: Doubleday, 1966. Lavishly illustrated, enthusiastically written.
- Sternberg, Josef von. Fun in a Chinese Laundry. London: Secker & Warburg, 1966. His autobiography, as artfully constructed as his films.
- Weinberg, Herman G. Josef von Sternberg. Paris: Editions Seghers, 1966; New York: E.P. Dutton, 1967. Enthusiastic; contains a full checklist of shorter pieces on JvS.
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February 28, 1974

The Devil is a Woman, question #1

Fusing the camera, reality and celluloid Josef von Sternberg both creates a stylized "reality" and skillfully draws us into it. Actors, actresses, lighting and sets are all clay to be molded by Sternberg's sure hand into something totally new and artificial, barring only a faint resemblance to what is generally thought to be reality. This is obvious in many facets of the film (e.g., acting and storyline) but it is most evident in the patterns light and dark assume on the screen -- each frame is so well organized and composed that it invites the term artificial, nothing in nature could be so orderly.

At one point in the film Don Pasqual (Lionel Atwell) has become little more than a stage-door johnny to Concha Perez (Marlene Dietrich) -- waiting for her after she performs in a nightclub. One rainy night she tells him she is very tired and goes to her room ostensibly to take a rest. Pasqual realizes the truth, that she is going to meet her bullfighter lover, and the following shots ensue: He steps outdoors into a courtyard outside Perez's dressingroom. It is raining and he immediately begins to get wet as he hesitates. The rain serves to prompt him into action but more importantly it reminds the viewer of the surface of the picture. Photographed rain causes the screen to practically glisten and reminds us of the flat surface of the picture. We realize that what is real in a motionpicture theater is the screen and the interplay of light and dark upon it and nothing else (such as narrative or characterization).

The next shot is of him rushing up a stairway toward her room. This is shot with a medium long shot and is obscured by trees, nets and other indescribably objects in the foreground. The stairway zig-zags diagonally from the lower right of the screen to the upper left and Pasqual's movement catches the eye and draws the viewer up the frame toward Perez's room. Following this is a well composed shot of Perez's balcony and louvered door from which light escapes. The light from the door is the only direct light in the frame and is surrounded by dim areas; a grey netting sweeps from the middle of the right hand side to the lower left corner. Into this highly controlled arena strides Don Pasqual. After beating unsuccessfully on the door he manages to kick some of the slats of the door out and finally knocks the whole thing in, releasing the light which has been pent up inside. He stands with his back to us for a moment, silhouetted by the bright light and well contained by the frame of the door. An impressively composed arrangement by any aesthetic standards. Our attention is absolutely rivetted to the entranceway to Concha's room, we are drawn into it by the spell of brilliant light, just as Pasqual has been drawn inexplicably to Concha by her radiant beauty. (Pasqual could not sooner give up Concha than we could divert our attention from the interior of her room.)

Pasqual and Antonio's infatuation with Concha is verified by Sternberg's placement of Dietrich at the center of attraction of practically every shot. He ((Sternberg)) accomplishes this through lighting and costuming as well as placement within the frame. When she is with some one in a grey or dark setting she wears white and/or is the subject of spotlights; when the setting is light (such as when she visits the all-white hospital where Pasqual is) she is dressed in black. On occasion Sternberg needed Concha

Also plays on the associations of black (death, everything that is opposed to hospital white.)

Very well described

to be equal with her mate: at these times she would dress in white (often luminescently so) but he (either Pasqual or Antonio) would be correspondingly dark. The contrast that results ultimately favors her as the brighter object, but it also emphasizes and lends power to their union. This effect was important when Sternberg wanted to indicate that Concha was capable only of a union composed of dynamic opposites that combat each other on a powerful and brilliant plain. Thus implying that a union is never as potent as when it (is between too opposite and conflicting elements.

It also indicates the contradictory emotions she elicits from men. To Pasqual especially, she is the women men love to hate: allured by her incapacitating beauty they struggle to be set free of her charms. Failing to do so they battle to win her favor.

You move
from the
specific to
the general
here in a
convincing
way

Assignment #3
Questions on Howard Hawks

1. Most of the characters in a Hawks film face a series of moral and psychological choices (in fact, one way to distinguish a "major" character from a "minor" character in a film by Hawks is to assess the number and nature of these choices). Describe some choices made in *ONLY ANGELS HAVE WINGS* and *RED RIVER*: what implications about character do we draw from them, and what behavior emerges from these situations?
2. In both films men are subject to stress and called upon to behave heroically within the confines of a rigorously defined world of action. What are some of the characteristics that define the heroes of the two films (cite specific examples)? Does it seem more than coincidental that Hawks has recently expressed interest in doing a film based on the life of Ernest Hemingway ("I knew him very, very well")? (Remember that this question deals primarily with Hawks, not Hemingway).
3. Both *ONLY ANGELS HAVE WINGS* and *RED RIVER* deal with a central Hawksian situation: an inexperienced newcomer or a novice must observe and learn the behavioral codes of a group before he or she wins acceptance. In some measure, in fact, this process of learning and adapting faces the viewer seeing a Hawks film for the first time. Describe the sorts of things learned by Bonnie Lee (and others) in *ONLY ANGELS HAVE WINGS* and by Matthew Garth and Tess Millay in *RED RIVER*: what do they learn, who teaches them, and how is their behavior affected? Do they in turn teach things to the "established" characters (Jeff Carter in *ANGELS*, Tom Dunson in *RED RIVER*)? How can this process of adaptation be extended to encompass Hawks's sophisticated underplaying of traditional forms (action melodrama, western)?
4. Describe the nature of the opposition and mutual qualification which gets enacted between the sexes in these two films. What do sexual conflicts add to the basic narrative structure; if a resolution of these tensions occurs in either film, what are the terms of accord?
5. Hawks's style has been described as "functional," an epithet neither approbative nor pejorative. Although the studio world of *Barranca* differs visually from the plains and skylines of *RED RIVER*, what common stylistic procedures can be discerned in the two films?

1 +
Fine job with lots
of good details and
an enjoyable style.

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March 8, 1974

Howard Hawks, question #3

There are a great many similarities between Howard Hawks' Only Angels Have Wings and Red River. The settings and plots differ, but each major character in one film has an almost identical counterpart in the other: Thomas Dunson and Jeff Carter, Bonnie Lee and Tess Millay, and Matthew Garth and Bat McPherson. These characters are not necessarily similar in their temperament or mannerisms, but they play the same role in the recurring Hawksian theme of the interaction of members of a group. Which is to say that the characters mentioned above resemble each other in the manner they deal with the group.

Nice that you
can see some
of these parallels
in these 2
different cases.
Good!

Take for example the pair which seems the most dissimilar: Garth and McPherson. At first glance there is nothing to couple these two. McPherson is a shady sort of character held in ill repute by the gang; while Garth is one of the most respected members of the cattle drive team, without his assistance Dunson would never have gotten as far as he did. Upon closer inspection, however, resemblances begin to appear. First of all, both of them are not really outside the group at any point, but they have been separated from it for a while. Garth for the years he left Dunson's company to make a name for himself as a gunslinger and McPherson for the time he spent ostracized from the aviation business because of a cowardly act he committed. McPherson has never been a part of the particular group of flyers in "Angels" but he was a member of a similar group. In the same manner, Garth never rode with Dunson and the men he (Dunson) gathered for the drive before, but he has been a part of the loosely knit cowboy fraternity.

Immediately upon joining the team they each develop a special relationship with the head man (Dunson in Red River, Carter in "Angels"), though once again the circumstances differ, the results remain the same. It doesn't matter that Garth hangs around Dunson to protect him and that McPherson hangs around Carter to be protected -- they (Garth and McPherson) both still learn the particulars of the society they have entered from the "established" man. In return they help maintain the welfare of the group (Garth by keeping order with his fast gun and McPherson by flying dangerous missions that no one else can handle.). In so doing they both teach their "masters" respect for the members of their group. Which is to say, Carter's faith in his men is verified by McPherson's brave behavior and Dunson is chastized for his lack of trust in his men by Garth's usurption of the command lead of the cattle drive.

On top of that, even their names sound similar: Matt and Bat. (well!)

Garth and McPherson, then, may be new to the particular group in their respective films, but they are not complete novices. Into this category of total naivete we must place Bonnie and Tess. Although they prove themselves to be pretty tough characters, they know nothing of the field they have stumbled into. Luckily for the storyline they each possess a definite hardness which prepares them for the rough professionalism of the men they confront in each film: Bonnie's father made his living flying through the air as a trapeze artist who eventually died because of his refusal to use a net (if this weren't Hawks we might detect some irony here) and Tess, it is intimated, is a lady of the night -- certainly not a luxurious occupation in nineteenth century Texas.

Why not?
The line
seems
inserted
as a
not so much
explains
of Arthur,
as for its
possible
comic/ironic
reverberations.
Do you really
believe Arthur is a
trapeze family?

The first thing Bonnie, Tess and the viewer must learn to accept in Dunson, Carter and their gangs is the almost callous professionalism they

Howard Hawks, 2
Jeremy Butler

practice. In "Angels" it first comes to the fore when Joe Southern crashes early in the film, talking heroically until the end about the dinner date he is going to have with Bonnie. When he is killed she becomes hysterical, but Carter and the rest accept the death laconically. "Well, he did all he could do," remarks Carter. When Bonnie takes him to task for his lack of overt emotion Carter launches into a tirade about the futility of that type of emotion. This leads one to conclude that he feels no emotion at all, but such is not the case. As he says to the sobbing Bonnie, "If you feel like bawling how do you think we feel?" Later, when Dutchman (who owns the planes) became emotional about Joe's death Carter said, "Joe died flying, didn't he? That's his job. He just wasn't good enough." In Red River this same theme is mentioned several times. In particular, Garth asks Dunson why he didn't compliment the men after a difficult fording of the Red River during the drive. To which Dunson responds simply, "It's their job."

The second factor Bonnie and Tess must cope with is the tremendous love of one man for another, especially Garth and Dunson and Kid Dabb and Carter. These men love each other with an overwhelming force which pales normal heterosexual love. Hence women must take a back seat to their man to man friendships. Take for example the dialogue following the near crash of Carter during a dangerous test flight:

BONNIE: You love him don't you, Kid.

KID: Yes, I guess I do.

BONNIE: Why can't I love him like you do?

As indicated by the quotation above Bonnie is envious of the love between these two men -- a love she can never hope to share. She and Carter develop their own special kind of relationship, but it only comes about once she accepts him and his code. Carter would never ask any woman to do anything, as he says repeatedly -- only at Bonnie's insistence of their compatibility and eventual acquiescence to his code do they get together.

The same holds true of Tess: only because of her perseverance and dedication does she get her man, but it is still on his own terms. (One difference between Tess and Bonnie is that Tess fights for the acceptance of both the headman, Dunson, and his protege, Garth.) Most importantly, she must realize and accept the iron-clad bond between Garth and Dunson. This she does and in fact even becomes an exponent of the code when she breaks up the fight between the two men and forces them to declare their love for each other.

Tess and Bonnie bring a lively determination into play which their men cannot easily dismiss. Compelled to take these women more seriously than they usually take women they learn not their own fallibility but rather a respect for women. Carter had lost it when a woman issued an ultimatum calling for his retirement from flying and Dunson lost it when the one woman he cared for was killed by Indians. Recognizing their need for women they still refuse to compromise themselves and therefore adopt subtle means to convey their newfound trust: Carter through the use of a double-headed coin and Dunson, more overtly, by telling Garth to marry Tess.

Perceptive
to the
difference
here

was this
really a loss
of respect,
though?
He may just
not be able to
face another woman
after losing Fern.

Assignment #3

1. Discuss the relationship between the family and the group (community, corps) in these two films. Does Ford pit one against the other, does he see them co-existing in some harmonious relationship? Make sure to base your arguments on one or two carefully watched sequences.
2. To what extent is it valid to describe Ford's attitude toward his historical material as idealistic, conservative, tradition-bound? Try to illustrate how Ford manages to convey his attitudes through visual details (arrangement of characters and objects in space, lighting, movement).
3. How does humor fit into Ford's films? Describe the specific kinds of humor to be found in the two westerns, and assess what this contributes to the narrative and mood of each film. Possibly a comparison with humor in films by Hawks or Sternberg might be in order here, but concentrate primarily on Ford.
4. "Ford tends to sublimate sexual attraction into either gallantry or heartiness: the relationships positively presented are always strictly 'wholesome' and honorable. . . . [sexual love] becomes a value only when subordinated to the concept of marriage and family, conceived less as the relationship of individual to individual than as the establishment of continuity within a civilized tradition" (Robin Wood). Based on these two films (and others you may have seen by Ford) assess the romantic attitudes between men and women, taking Wood's statement into account.
5. The atmosphere of Monument Valley, and the evocation of a certain frontier environment, are obviously important features of the two films--perhaps as important as the action of the films. Describe how Ford evokes this atmosphere, and what qualities it gives to the pictures; if the setting had to be pigeonholed as either mythical or realistic, how would you support your choice?

Selected reference material:

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- Dexter, John. The Cinema of John Ford. New York: Barnes, 1972.
- Dogdomovich, Peter. John Ford. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.
- Femin, George N. and William K. Overton. The western: From Silents to Cinerama. New York: Orion Press, 1962.
- Fleischer, Stefan. "A Study Through Stills of MY DARLING CLEMENTINE," Journal of Modern Literature, 3.11 (1973), 241-252.
- Hollen, Peter. "The auteur theory," in Signs and Meaning in the Cinema (Bloomington and London: University of Indiana Press, 1969), pp. 94-102.
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English 163
Spring 1974
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Assignment #4

Suggested questions on FURY:

1. Lang obviously used film to express serious social criticism; he has said of this film "I saw the possibility of saying something against lynching." Does the strength of FURY lie primarily in its effectiveness as a statement against lynching and mob violence, or do other dramatic impulses predominate? How is Lang able to avoid clichés? Do you agree with Peter Bogdanovich that "long after the social aspects of . . . [this film] . . . is forgotten, the more universal qualities will continue to have strength and poignancy; or can Lang's social statement be separated from the "more universal qualities"?
2. Try to describe Lang's visual style as specifically as you can: how do such elements as cutting, composition, lighting, and the movement of characters within the frame contribute to his style, and what seem to be the motivating factors in Lang's choice of technical devices?
3. To some extent (you might wish to express your own opinion as to how much) the ending of FURY is unsatisfactory. Since the film attempts to portray some of society's injustices (in terms applicable as much to America as to Germany), and since so much of the film is subversive and critical, Tracy's final surrender may seem to be unmotivated. Does the film sustain its ending in any way, and does this ending vitiate to any degree what has gone before? (NB. Try to avoid an explanation which cites the "Hollywood ending" or "commercialism"; it should be noted that although Lang was forced to include the final embrace, the more telling act of surrender to the law was in the script which he approved and, in part, wrote.)
4. How does the Tracy character function in the film? What do the moral ambiguities in his behavior add to the film as a whole, and how does Lang portray these moral problems in visual terms and in the editing?

ENGLISH 163
Spring 1974
Mr. Silverman

Assignment #4
Ernst Lubitsch

1. Lubitsch tends to puncture romantic platitudes--he has this in common with Keaton, Hawks and Hitchcock, among others--and thus tends to oppose the purity of women, the idealization of love, the sanctity of marriage, the finality of sex. Describe in some detail, drawing on both verbal and visual elements, a sequence from *TROUBLE IN PARADISE* and/or *THE MARRIAGE CIRCLE* which seems to you pervaded by this worldly cynicism. What means does Lubitsch employ to prevent his vision from turning into the sour, mordant views of what Andrew Sarris calls (in describing some other critical evaluations of Lubitsch) "the vision of a stale head-waiter in a second-rate café?"
2. Based on *TROUBLE IN PARADISE* and *THE MARRIAGE CIRCLE*, as well as any other Lubitsch films you may have seen, try to define some of the ways in which Lubitsch's universe may be defined. Does this universe have a moral dimension?; if so, try to define the sort of morality appropriate in each case. Does the comic energy of Lubitsch's films avoid moral statement, or at least make that statement a heavily qualified one?
3. Lubitsch's world is permeated with objects--clocks, handbags, closed doors, mirrors, beds, jewels. How does the director isolate and animate this seemingly inert world--through framing and editing--and how do the characters escape (or fail to escape) domination by the materials of the universe they inhabit?
4. Although he made 26 of his 39 feature films in America, Lubitsch continued to be preoccupied with gradations of class and intricacies of manners long after he had left Europe. Most of his characters were drawn from a wealthy, sophisticated upper class, were placed in continental settings, and were equipped with a code of behavior surely alien to most bourgeois American moviegoers. Can you describe the distinctions of class and manners in *THE MARRIAGE CIRCLE* and *TROUBLE IN PARADISE* (on what are these distinctions based, who is included/excluded, how are distinctions expressed), and can you suggest some of the means employed by Lubitsch to make these concerns meaningful to a primarily American audience?

GOOD STUFF. + NICE
HANDING OF WHAT P. STUBBS WOULD HAVE
CALLED 'TONE A'.

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March 28, 1974

Ernst Lubitsch, question # 1

ACTUALLY,
HARDLY
NEW BEEN
TO AMERICA
BY 1905
(CLARK
UNIVERSITY)
+
BUTLER'S
HILARY
COMIC FILM
WAS A HIT
IN BRITAIN
AND
SOUTHERN
EUROPEAN
ATTITUDE
TOWARD
S.F.

The cynicism of Lubitsch is, in the final analysis, unconvincing. He conveys not the cynicism of some critical outsider surveying with a hostile eye the empty, uninteresting lives of his upper-class characters, but rather the comfortable cynicism which affluence affords. By this I mean he adopts the attitude rich folks adopt when they are bored with their existence: they've seen everything and practically dare you to show them something new or different. Take, for example, the skeptical manner Lubitsch parodies psychologists in The Marriage Circle. At the time of "Circle" (1923) psychology was barely out of its Oral Stage, Sigmund Freud had appeared on the scene just a few years earlier and he was all the rage among intellectuals (especially in France, see Un Chien Andalou, 1928, or other surrealist works), but Lubitsch parodies them (psychologists) lightly and with a touch of irreverence. He has Dr. Gustav Muller (Creighton Hale) dismiss a talkative female patient saying, "Anyone who talks so much can't be sick." Perhaps it's only his middle class background (with its customary distrust of psychologists) cropping up, but moreover it illustrates his cynical attitude toward psychology and its accompanying style of intellectual thought.

Lubitsch's frank treatment of sex, as well as his sexual innuendos and teasing, also indicates this certain sort of cynicism I am attempting to define. In Trouble in Paradise, during one kissing scene between Kay Francis (as Marianne Colet) and Herbert Marshall (as Gaston Monescu) the camera wanders from its simple medium shot of them kissing to first a reflection of that image in a mirror, then another mirror with a similar image and then the shadows of their embracing bodies on the bed. The sequence seems subtle in these times when the overriding concern of Hugh Hefner is whether he should "go pink", now that the public hair barrier has been shattered, but I feel certain that no one in 1932 missed the implication. At another point Francis and Marshall are engaged in lively banter as they plan out the day just before they retire for the night: "We'll breakfast in the garden together." Francis mumbles her assent. "Next we'll go horseback riding together." Again she nods yes as the tempo of the dialogue increases. Finally Marshall says, "Then a nap." Francis catches herself just before the melody of Marshall's words brings "together" out of her, but not before the audience giggles a bit at her embarrassment for even vaguely suggesting an illicit afternoon interlude. It would take a worldly man indeed to use such dialogue. With the inception of the Production Code in 1934, both the double bed in the former scene and the insinuating words of the latter would disappear from the market.

Perhaps the line between cynicism and a "sour, mordant view" is just too thin for me to draw -- still I feel Lubitsch ultimately is not cynical. The success of "Circle", Lady Windermere's Fan and "Trouble" depend too much upon the "un-cynicism" of the viewer. The truly cynical moviegoer could not care less if A is trying to get rid of his wife, B, while B is in love with C, who loves his wife, D, who in turn is the object of E's amorous advances. Furthermore, our hypothetical spectator would not care if A gets rid of B, B and E discover each other and C and D continue to love each other -- as they do in The Marriage Circle. Lubitsch depends too much upon the social conventions of upper-class society for his humor and dramatic tension. One needs to believe more than a little bit in the validity of the societies

WHY NOT TRY FOR SOME MORE FORMAL ANALYSIS?

Ernst Lubitsch, 2
Jeremy Butler

you may have a point here **INDEED**
in the three films cited above in order to enjoy the films, with the possible exception of "Trouble", in which we are presented with sympathetic characters outside of society. But even those characters who use the high society people to their own advantage still respect that society -- they are not out to destroy it, but rather to just use it a bit. As with other "free riders", they may bend the society's rules, but they must not break them or they would be without means of support.

(YOU HAVE LUBITSCH (+ HIS AUDIENCE))
READ TO RIGHTS ON THIS POINT.

Assignment #5
Orson Welles
THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS

1. Describe the concerted effect which comprises the party sequence ("the last of the great, long-remembered dances that everybody talked about," as Welles's narration puts it). Try to take into account the movement of Stanley Cortez's camera, Welles's placement of the actors within (and without) the frame, the subjects talked about by George and Lucy, the dancing (possibly comparable to that in a film by Ford or Max Ophüls), the use of the central stairway, the lighting effects, depth of focus--and anything else you can synthesize within the extraordinary achievement of this sequence.
2. In describing George Amberson Minafer, Peter Cowie (in A Ribbon of Dreams) has declared that "one can understand his reactions even if one cannot sympathize with him. But without doubt he belongs to the scorpions of Welles's world; like Kane, like Arkadin, like Quinlan [in TOUCH OF EVIL; the metaphor of the scorpion is drawn from the dialogue both of this film and of MR. ARKADIN], he irritates and blights the lives of those around him almost in spite of himself." Welles's attraction to morally ambiguous characters (besides those listed above one might cite his portrayals of Lear, Macbeth, Othello, Falstaff, Charles Rankin in THE STRANGER and Mr. Clay in THE IMPERIAL WALTZ, all roles played by Welles himself) seems to border on obsession. Given this emphasis on ambiguity throughout Welles's career, we might attempt to see George Minafer as a more subtly shaded character than Cowie's description would suggest. Can this hypothesis be defended, and can we see this impulse to present characters in qualified and oblique ways as a characteristic of Welles's dramaturgy?
3. Does Welles's style synthesize any of the impulses which characterized the work of other directors seen during the semester--Sternberg's intense pictorialism, Hawks's narrative efficiency, Griffith's strongly marked cutting? Why would, in this regard, Welles's admiration for John Ford seem stylistically logical? Does the style of AMBERSONS seem to you successfully unified (does deep focus, for example, sit well, within the episodic attempt throughout the film to get a "Currier and Ives" effect?), or need a film have a highly unified style to qualify it as a "stylistically successful" film, whatever that may be?
4. Much of Welles's work--and THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS especially--deals with the passing of time, wasted lives, regret and loss. How does Welles convey this falling away in language and image? Clearly this complex nostalgia encroaches upon individual characters (may even define them); but the vision also extends to the American past, and the encroachment of "progress." Try to examine this larger theme even as you take into account the fate of individual characters. Should John Ford's name be edged into the discussion at this point; if so, in what respect(s)?

Assignment #3
Preston Sturges' SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS

1. This film was made after almost three decades of continuous American screen comedy, and although the name of Ernst Lubitsch is invoked reverentially by one character and that of Frank Capra by another it becomes clear after the first ten minutes that the manic energy and broad observation on display in SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS will not stand close comparison with either Lubitsch's spare gentility or Capra's soft-boiled cynicism. From your viewing of films at for this course (and for less noble purposes, as well) try to define this film's place within the various traditions of American screen comedy (slapstick-and-chase, screwball, comedy of manners, romantic comedy, social satire, and any others that may come to mind). Specific comparisons (with Lubitsch, Capra, Keaton or Hawks, for example) are invited. Specific details are invited. Does the mixture of style in Sturges' film denote a breakdown or weakness in his film?
2. Sturges constantly piles his effects into excessive heaps, never letting an audience breathe deeply or blink its eyes for fear of missing some detail. His characters, for example, are quirky and manic, while never deviating completely into robots. Can his delineation of comic types be compared with that of other comic artists (Dickens? Kafka? Chester Gould?), and what seems to be Sturges' attitude toward his own creations? Can we see this impulse toward caricature and quick portraiture as a manifestation of impatience with the slow, cumulative development of "character and situation" found in many narrative films?
3. Does Sturges succeed in making a picture with a "social message" without deviating from his chosen path of anarchy? Or does the film essentially side with its protagonist, Sullivan, and come out finally on the side of Donald and Geofy, with social implications extracted only at the risk of losing critical sanity?
4. Obviously, SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS embodies an ambivalence between High Culture and popular (not Pop) art; Sullivan seems as nervous and defensive about his lowbrow financial successes as we may be about enjoying the antics of Sturges' comic creations. How does this division get resolved in the film (or does it?), and does the resolution (or irresolution) seem satisfactory to you? You might try to describe some of the film's more scrutable dichotomies (highbrow/lowbrow, art/experience, fame/privacy, money/poverty). After all, comedy is supposed to resolve social distinctions, and provide unified (i.e., happy) endings, and it would seem that if SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS is to succeed in this sense some of these dichotomies would have to be ironed out. Are they?

Limited
in length, but
a fine job.

Jeremy Butler
English 163
Mr. Silverman
April 18, 1974

Preston Sturges, question #3, after a fashion.

Good
Point

Preston Sturges' Sullivan's Travels is not so much an anarchistic, slap-dash comedy as a confusing mishmash of statements, or "messages". Which is to say it is anarchistic, but not in the manner of Sennett or other comedy film pioneers who relied heavily on improvisation (see the shorts Fatty Arbuckle and Buster Keaton made between 1917 and 1920). Their humor often arose from creating an absurd situation and then going one step beyond that: an excursion into totally anarchistic chaos. Sturges' world, though charged with a highly explosive energy, is tightly contained. Take for example the sequence immediately following the battle between "Capital" and "Labor" on the train: John L. Sullivan and his producers argue at breakneck pace, barely pausing to breathe, but still we have the impression that it is a screen dialogue (no one really talks that fast). As such we know that it has been created for a specific purpose and with an overriding mentality strictly controlling it. Sturges uses anarchism in sequences such as the chase scene early in the film when Sullivan attempts to lose his publicity corps by accepting a ride from the "Major", but in general Sullivan's Travels follows an orderly path. It is as if we were in a railroad car with a cargo of monkeys -- things might be awfully chaotic along the way, but the train would still remain on the tracks and would still get from point A to point B.

To carry the metaphor just one step further, the message which carries Sullivan's Travels along its course could be likened to the tracks in a large railyard. Occasionally Sturges pulls the wrong switch and the film contradicts itself and is almost derailed. If we suppose, for example, that the moral that Sullivan, a film director in a position similar to Sturges', learns in all his attempts to find truth is that film is a medium exclusively suited to entertain people, then we are instantly stuck in the midst of a contradiction. In order to arrive at the supposition that film must not be taken seriously, we will have had to take Sullivan's Travels seriously. Possibly one could double back on oneself and conclude that Sturges did not take Sullivan's lesson seriously so Sturges feels no compunctions about making a movie with a message. This, however, seems ludicrously circular. If we take it still another step, we might believe that since Sturges did not take Sullivan seriously and therefore made a serious movie regardless of Sullivan's lesson then he did not make a serious film because he expected no one to take Sullivan seriously, as Sturges himself didn't. One might ask oneself, "Where will it end?"

This confusion of messages is the true anarchy in Sullivan's Travels. Sturges, like John Ford, Howard Hawks and other American directors, refuses to acknowledge the validity of thinking about a film before, while or after a film is made. He operates instinctively, but not, as I said before, anarchistically. This modus operandi succeeds in films which pose no questions of the purpose of art, such as the Pluto cartoon in the film, but when these questions are asked, as they are by John Sullivan, then we deserve a more carefully considered answer than Sturges provides us, with. He attempts to show us what can happen if a film director takes himself too seriously, but instead he illustrates what happens when a film director refuses to take himself seriously enough.

Maybe so -
you argue
permanently
about the
unsatisfying
film, it's
not sure
what you
are expecting
it to be
pimped.
It's limited

PHANTOM LADY (Universal Pictures, 1944)

Director: Robert Siodmak. Script: Bernard C. Schoenfeld; based on a novel by William Irish. Photography: Elwood Bredell. Associate Producer: Joan Harrison.

Franchot Tone (Marlowe), Ella Raines (Carol Richmond), Alan Curtis (Scott Henderson), Thomas Gomez (Police Inspector Burgess), Elisha Cook, Jr. (Drummer), Aurora (Monteiro, the Chi-ca-boom dancer), Fay Helm (Ann Terry), Regis Toomey (Detective chewing gum), Joseph Crehan (Second detective with Burgess), Andrew Tombes (Bartender), Doris Lloyd (Hot saleslady), Virginia Brissac (Woman doctor), Milburn Stone (D.A.)

THE LINEUP (Columbia Pictures, 1958)

Director: Don Siegel. Producer: Jaime Del Valle. Screenplay: Stirling Silliphant. Photography: Hal Mohr. Editor: Al Clark. Art Director: Ross Bellah. Sets: Louise Dage. Musical Direction: Mischa Bakaleinikoff.

Eli Wallach (Danwer), Robert Keith (Julian), Richard Jaeckel (Sandy McClain), Warner Anderson (Lt. Guthrie), Mary La Roche (Dorothy Bradshaw), William Lealio (Larry Warner), Emile Meyer (Inspector Al Quine), Marshall Reed (Inspector Fred Asher), Raymond Bailey (Philip Dressler), Vaughan Taylor (The Man)

Assignment #6
Siodmak/Siegel

1. How meaningful and necessary do the psychological explanations of character and situation seem in these two films? What does it mean, in effect, when a character is labelled as "psychopathic," and how does the action of the film(s) become modified in the light of such a description?
2. Describe the films in purely stylistic terms. Both films are thrillers--simple and linear, rather programmed in outcome--but are vivified through style in different ways (perhaps you might want to isolate a single effect, such as lighting in PHANTOM LADY, camera placement in THE LINEUP).
3. In each film the idea of the city plays a prominent role in defining both the action and providing the milieu within which particular aspects of character are nourished. Define some of these uses in each film, isolating particular sequences. Which film uses its setting more consistently, and in what way? You might wish to denote the emphasis and de-emphasis of the picturesque, as it varies from film to film.

English 163
Spring 1974
Mr. Silverman

Assignment #7

1. Both Aldrich's THE BIG KNIFE and Ray's BITTER VICTORY seem permeated with an atmosphere of despair and incipient defeat. Rather than attempting to search out the roots of this histrionic anguish (they seem obscure), try to describe the manner in which each director attempts to utilize the resources at his command (actors, script, composition, editing) to adduce this emotion. Aldrich strives for the hysterical moment, Ray for a more lengthy anguish. Which seems to you the more successful, and why? *MUSIC*
2. The problem of authority is crucial to each work. What sort of authority (moral, psychological, financial, hierarchical, intellectual) gets challenged in each film, what are the responses, and what (if anything) replaces broken authority? Compare these films, if you have space, to a film where the moral and hierarchical guidelines remain fixed (FORT APACHE always comes to mind, but FURY would seem an equally fruitful point of comparison).
3. Each film restricts itself markedly in the arrangement of its characters in space. The effect is very claustrophobic. Can you account for this cramped feeling in terms of the psychological situation of the films? Make sure you try to describe this in terms of physical space--that is, a description of the film as a whole should accompany any psychological analysis of the central characters.
4. Can you account for the persistent moralizing and haranguing that goes on in these films? Are the directors trying to tell us something (if so, what?), or is there some discrepancy between what is said and what is shown, between the worth with which the film-maker views his central character and the view we have of him (Aldrich would seem to find Charlie Castle a "serious" repository of thwarted idealism, just as Ray would undoubtedly see James Leith as a man with intellectual and moral authority)?

Assignment #6

1. Fuller seems to be making some sort of statement about American society through his use of the insane asylum in SHOCK CORRIDOR. What can we see in his treatment of the various characters, in the reporter's attitude toward them, and in the demonic microcosm as a whole?
2. Fuller insists (in interviews) that he's satisfying his audience's dramatic expectations, and at the same time giving them something to think about. Many critics have followed his lead, and dealt with the themes of allegiance and alienation, initiation and survival, and others which seem to exist within his work. At the same time, one might argue that Fuller's work is so extreme, cartoon-like and generally perverse that serious evaluation should be punished. Can we approach these films seriously, and--if so--in what way? Are they merely parodies of "serious" directors (of John Ford in RUN OF THE ARROW, for example)? Is there any way that these films can be seen as both serious and parodic simultaneously?
3. Describe Fuller's style, on the basis of these two films. Try to describe the lengthy conversation scenes, as well as the violent action (the run in RUN OF THE ARROW, the riots in SHOCK CORRIDOR). Perhaps Fuller's style could be linked with various pop artists, Godard, Warhol and other modernists, while at the same time a backward glance at traditional stylists (Ford and Hawks, to mention directors with an affinity for action) would be helpful.

2x

Jeremy Butler
English 163
Mr. Silverman
May 6, 1974

Sam Fuller: Filmmaker as Cro-Magnum Man

The concept of something being a "parody of itself" has always seemed foreign and contrived to me -- as if the creator of (let's narrow our vision) a film wanted to make a serious sort of film, but was afraid to indicate he was serious for fear of something akin to ridicule. It is the perfect catch, as far as the artist is concerned: if critics acclaim it as a major work of art he can not complain and if they condemn it, he can say, "But it was all in fun! Don't you feel silly for taking me seriously." Naturally the artist's intentions are not the most important consideration to have when regarding a work of art. The work must stand or fall inevitably on its own merits. Fortunately enough, the "self-parody" also works out opportunely for the interpreter of art, unless he or she is a critic of the John Simon temperament. With this mode of reasoning the art interpreter may exalt absolutely anything. If a film is a shoddily put together western, then it cleverly parodies John Ford. If the dialogue is inane and uninteresting, then it insightfully pokes fun at the dull dialogue in Jean-Luc Godard's films. If the viewpoint of the filmmaker (which pervades his films more than most filmmakers would allow) is simplistically conservative, then it playfully satirizes Sam Fuller. If the filmmaker who fits all of the above descriptions is Sam Fuller, then he parodies himself.

In Fuller's films Shock Corridor and Run of the Arrow the viewer must work harder than Fuller did in order to obtain any gratification from the films. For example, the novice viewer of a Fuller film probably enters the theater expecting nothing in particular. He or she has no reason to believe Fuller is going to parody himself or play games with film critics' minds. Soon enough a character (the nuclear physicist in Shock Corridor, during one of his sane moments) will make a remark such as "Too many intellectuals afraid to use the pistol of common sense [when dealing with the Communists]." Or, "A man can't go to a mental hospital, subject himself to all sorts of tests and expect to come out sane," as the head of the mental institution said in Shock Corridor. But the problems lie deeper than mere dialogue inanities. The pace of the films tug and shove us haltingly along the route of insultingly obvious storylines. We blast excitedly through action scenes such as the burning of the fort in Run of the Arrow or the fight between Johnny Barratt and the police psychiatrist in Shock Corridor and then fidget through the interminable scenes of exposition such as the talk between O'Meara and his mother or Johnny discussing his plans with Cathy, his editor and the psychiatrist who helped him set up the fraud. If one were reading a cartoon paced as Fuller's films are one would probably skip ahead a few pages. Innocently considering these facets of the films, as they must have at Yale in 1965, we might simply brand Fuller a poor and "pathetically" conservative filmmaker, but if we strain our sensibilities somewhat, then we can come to the conclusion that Fuller is a primitively brilliant filmmaker: the filmmaker as Cro-magnum man.

The question which arises promptly is "Why both?" Perhaps if one grew up loving Fuller films, then it might be important to one to justify his adult nostalgia for the films. Perhaps if one were French, then one need not be concerned about the unimaginative language. Perhaps if one had been stifled with heavy, pedantically intellectual films (see John Frankenheimer and Dalton Trumbo), then one might crave the crude simplicity of Fuller. Perhaps if one were 13 years old or cinematically unsophisticated, then the jerky

Fuller, 2
Jeremy Butler

cuts, the uninspired dialogue, the cliché situations and the flat characters of Fuller's world might not disappoint you. Those who fail to find themselves in one of the above niches will have to work to enjoy Fuller. They will have to create a new critical sensibility to be able to calmly absorb his films. Just as auteurism brought to light many unsung heroes of the cinema, so will primitivism (primitif Americaine) bring to the fore directors lost in the dust of studio storage bins.

I think you state your case well, but it doesn't get you too far to be so negative; I detect a response so hostile as to be almost nasty. I used to feel this way about Fuller myself; I think you can try to find something in these films worth writing about, or enjoying, w/out resorting to "primitivism," as Savin does -- anyway, I think his use of the word has been misinterpreted in a patronising way. (Some painters are described as primitifs but no one thinks they're Cro-Magnons.)